

**Subject: Gypsies of Woodside need your help****Date:** Thu, 20 Jun 2002 14:27:17 +0100**From:** "Jake BOWERS" <jake@jakebowers.fsnet.co.uk>**To:** "Editorial" <editorial@theecologist.org>, <david.bangs@btinternet.com>, <CODONA9@aol.com>, "bowers.abelgratis.com" <danny@bowers.abelgratis.com>, "Barrie" <barrie@uk49.fsnet.co.uk>,

"Alastair McIntosh" &lt;mail@AlastairMcIntosh.com&gt;, "adrian arbib" &lt;arbib@dircon.co.uk&gt;, "FFT" &lt;fft@communitybase.org&gt;

**CC:** "William Frankham" <William.C.Frankham@btinternet.com>, <ustiben.2@ntlworld.com>, "The Gypsy Council" <thegypsycouncil@btinternet.com>, "Simon Evans" <simonevans@openproductions.co.uk>, "Simon Birch" <scbirch@compuserve.com>, <POPPYSZAYBO@cs.com>, <MorrisRC1@cf.ac.uk>, "Jo McGuire" <Jo@mcguire2000.fsnet.co.uk>, "Jason Torrance" <Jason.Torrance@uk.greenpeace.org>**Dear Friends,****Please spread this message as far and as wide as you possibly can.****All the best,****Jake**

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@

**Gypsies of Woodside appeal for help to resist their eviction by Mid Beds District Council.**

Five hundred years after first arriving in this country, British Gypsies are still being shoved around. In January this year, the government found that 2,774 caravans – or at least 20% of all British Gypsies were living on unauthorised encampments often without access to adequate schooling, sanitation or healthcare. At the present rate of expanding Gypsy site provision, it will take more than 50 years to provide enough legal and secure stopping places for all British Gypsies.

&lt;?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" /&gt;

Current government policy recommends that travellers should house themselves on their own land, yet Gypsy families who attempt to do so are often denied planning permission. While over 80% of planning applications from settled people are granted consent, while more than 90% of applications from Gypsies are refused.

In Sandy, Bedfordshire, however, one group of Gypsies is battling to get planning consent for a new kind of Gypsy site so that they may live in security and dignity. In 1997, 27 Gypsy families clubbed together to buy Woodside, a 17-acre touring caravan park with full planning permission. But when the Gypsies moved on to the park, Mid-Bedfordshire council claimed they did not have permission for permanent occupation and issued enforcement notices requiring the removal of all caravans. In July last year the council set aside £230,000 to finance clearance of the community. On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, the council is going to the high court to be allowed to carry out its enforcement notices, forcing the Woodside community back on the road.

The Woodside caravan park is unlike any of the 325 council Gypsy sites in this country. It isn't surrounded by barbed wire fences designed to keep the inhabitants in. It hasn't even been built near a sewage works or any other industrial facility. It looks, in fact, more like a modern hamlet than a ghetto, except that the homes are on wheels rather than stone foundations. At the centre of the community is a large green where children play in safety. Yet the council wants the site removed on the grounds that it is having an adverse impact on the environment. The Gypsies say the council is using an environmental smokescreen to hide their racist attitudes towards travellers.

"They say we are out of character with the area, but how can we be when we've always been here?" says Woodside spokesman and National Traveller Action Group chairman Clifford Codona, who, like many Gypsies, once worked as a seasonal agricultural labourer. "They don't need us any more, so they want to expel us. They can't stand the fact that, for the first time ever, Gypsies have their own village green!"

Faced with their imminent eviction the Gypsies of Woodside are appealing for as many people as possible to come and help them resist their removal. "If you believe it's time to stop shoving British Gypsies from pillar to post, we need your help to turn away the bailiffs if they come to remove the Gypsies of Woodside." Says Clifford Codona. "After 500 years of persecution we're saying enough is enough. It's time to give all of Britain's 100,000 Gypsies the security and dignity everybody else takes for granted."

#### What you can do:

1. Please come up to Woodside the night before the expected eviction attempt (from June 24<sup>th</sup> onwards) enjoy a midsummer night of Gypsy singsong around the fires - and be ready to protest when the council and private contractors come. There's plenty of room for tents and caravans. Woodside is in the village of Hatch near Sandy, Bedfordshire just minutes off the A1. Look at the following map for directions.

<http://www.streetmap.co.uk/streetmap.dll?G2M?X=515520&Y=247360&A=Y&Z=5>

2. Email [andy.rayment@uk.uumail.com](mailto:andy.rayment@uk.uumail.com) head of Mid Beds Council urging him to reconsider his intention to evict the community of Gypsies at Woodside Caravan Park, Sandy, Bedfordshire.

For more information on how British Gypsy sites policy has made a third of British Gypsies homeless, read the following article "No Room to Move" on the Guardian website.  
[www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4427029,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4427029,00.html)